

Today we are releasing a report by the Department of Education that makes it clear that any part of a long-term successful strategy for America requires us to do more, not less, to meet our children's growing educational needs. Every year the halls of our schools resound more loudly with what has been called, as Secretary Riley said, the baby boom echo.

The children of the baby boom generation are breaking enrollment records for the fourth year in a row now. This academic year, 53.2 million students will fill our elementary and secondary schools. That's nearly half a million more than last year. All the details are in this report, and they will be released later today. But think about it, over 53 million students, more diverse than ever before, from more backgrounds, giving us a chance to be the best prepared country in the world for the global society of the 21st century if, but only if, we educate them well.

There's another thing I want to emphasize about it that this report said that I just hadn't thought about until I was briefed on it. The pattern of enrollment is changing. As the children grow older, it is the high schools and colleges, even more than the elementary and middle schools, that will carry the burden. During the next decade, our high schools are projected to swell with the ranks of 1.3 million new students. This report gives our Nation an important assignment, to make the investments necessary to meet the demands of the future and our obligations to these children.

We've worked hard for 6½ years to invest in education and to bring real change to our schools. Secretary Riley's leadership has helped us to make historic investments. We've opened the doors to college to virtually every American with the HOPE scholarship and increased Pell grants and other loans and grants and credits. We have worked hard—and I think we're going to make it—to connect every classroom to the Internet by the year 2000. We have worked to strengthen performance and accountability in our schools and to help them meet the Nation's educational goals.

But Principal Greer described the conditions that exist in an awful lot of our schools, far too many—overcrowded classes held in

trailers, the shortage of individual attention by trained teachers. The challenges are going to increase as enrollment rises and a projected 2 million of our teachers retire in the next few years.

The baby boom echo is another reason why I feel so strongly that we have to act now, to build new schools and fix old ones, to hire trained teachers, especially in math and science, especially for our high schools. I have proposed, as part of our balanced budget, to build or renovate up to 6,000 schools nationwide; and to fulfill the commitment I made to Congress to hire 100,000 new teachers for our Nation's schools, to lower class size in the early grades, coincidentally freeing up resources for our schools to hire the other teachers they need in other areas.

Unfortunately, the congressional majority wants to back off from our commitment to more teachers and smaller classes, and the tax plan they have proposed would do further damage to those priorities. It would not do anything approaching what we've proposed to build or modernize schools—about a tenth of what we recommended. It would not allow us to pay off the debt. It would not add a day to the life of the Social Security Trust Fund or the Medicare Trust Fund. It would also lead, if the present budget discipline holds, to substantial, even drastic cuts in education and other national priorities, like national defense, medical research, and fighting crime and protecting the environment.

Now I have said that I will veto this plan, and I know that there's a lot of hoopla going on around the country, from town meetings to paid political ads, to try to change the opinion of the American people. But no matter how much advertising is done or how much argument is made—since we're talking about education today, I think one of the central achievements of this administration has been to restore arithmetic to the budgeting of the Government. *[Laughter]* You know, this is not trigonometry. This is not algebra. This is not calculus, and it is not supply side economics. It's basic arithmetic.

We got from a \$290 billion deficit to a \$99 billion surplus while almost doubling our investment in education and training by going back to arithmetic in Washington. And no

amount of argument will change the arithmetic of the population of the kids going into our schools. No amount of argument will change the arithmetic of the doubling of our seniors. No amount of argument will change the arithmetic that there are going to be relatively fewer people working while more people draw Social Security and Medicare. No amount of argument will change the arithmetic of the number of teachers who are going to retire. And the truth is that the American people deep down inside sort of sense this.

So yes, I'll veto the tax plan. But let's don't stop with a negative. Let's make something good happen here. This is about something positive. This can be a great thing for America, having all these kids in the schools from all these different backgrounds. They can make us a bigger, stronger, more diverse, richer, more successful country.

But we have to do right by them. We've got to give them a good economy. We've got to make sure that when the baby boomers retire, the parents of these children don't have to spend money that they would otherwise spend educating their children and helping them grow, taking care of their parents because we haven't done right by Social Security and Medicare. And we've got to give them a decent, world-class education. And if we could just go back to arithmetic, we can figure it out.

Now let me tell you what the alternative is. If this tax bill that's just passed, if I said, "Oh, well, they had all these town meetings, and they had all these ads," and, "Oh, the polls have changed," and, "Oh, I better sign it," and "Oh, we had a big celebration here," within fairly short order, we would find the following: Today, we help 12 million kids in poor communities to make more of their education. If the tax plan passes, over the new few years, we'd have to tell 6 million of them we couldn't do it anymore. Today, we help a million children learn to read independently by the third grade. If the plan passes, we'd have to tell more than half of them we couldn't help them anymore. Today, we're nearing our goal of enrolling a million preschoolers in Head Start. If the plan were to pass, we'd have to turn over 400,000 away.

Compared to our proposal, this tax plan would mean to those already in school—never mind the ones that are coming, already in school—larger classes, fewer teachers, more trailers. That's what it means. Sounds like a country song, doesn't it? *[Laughter]* Larger classes, fewer teachers, more trailers. *[Laughter]* I like country music, but we can do better than that. *[Laughter]*

So again I say, let's put first things first. Let's decide—before we do the tax cut, let's decide what we have to do as a nation to be a great nation. Let's decide what it takes to take care of the aging of America, so the children of the baby boomers don't have to take funds away from raising their grandchildren; to save Social Security and Medicare. Let's decide what it takes, in addition to the surplus generated by Social Security taxes, to just get us out of debt in the next several years, to guarantee a whole generation of lower interest rates and higher economic growth. Let's decide what we have to do to give our children a world-class education.

Then let's put that against the projected surplus—and I emphasize the word "projected"—and string all those numbers out for 10 years, along with whatever we think we have to do for our farmers, who are getting killed out there in this very difficult international market; what we have to do for medical research; what it takes to protect the environment; and subtract from the projected surplus those things, after which there will be a number. Let's give that number back to the American people in a tax cut. And you know, since it's 10 years and it's projected, maybe there's some little play one way or the other but not a lot.

Now, ironically, the tax cut I proposed gives about the same dollar benefits to the middle class as the one that the Congress passed. People in my income group wouldn't get anything out of it, but people in my income group, by and large, and higher, have done pretty well in this economy, in this stock market, and care far more about keeping interest rates down and economic growth going, because they know they'll do well.

The only other thing that I think is very important is, I think that my new markets tax cuts ought to pass, because I think we